How to Make Team Meetings Less Painful Than a Root Canal

If you manage 2 or more employees, it's a good idea to have regular team meetings. Team meetings encourage collaboration, a sense of belonging and identity, help coordinate interdependent work, and from the employee's perspective, are a good opportunity to get fed and break up the routine of the day.

However, with poor strategy and planning, team meetings can also be a horrible waste of time and the subject of angst and ridicule from your team members. They can be as painful as a two-hour root canal!

One way to reap the benefits of a good team meeting and avoid the scorn of your team is to be thoughtful about how you use them.

Here are 5 good reasons to have a team meeting:

1. To solve problems, make decisions, or develop a plan.

This is the #1 reason to get any group together! Teeing up a meaty topic for everyone to get involved with harnesses the collective wisdom of your team, creates a culture of collaboration and teamwork, and can be energizing. For this to be effective, ALL members of the team need to be able to contribute. The problem, decision, or plan has to be something that affects the *entire* team and that everybody has some expertise to contribute. If not, take it "off-line" with a sub-set of your team.

Allow enough time – at least an hour. 1-2 of these is usually enough for any routine team meeting, given the amount of energy required to work through meaty issues.

2. To make important, timely announcements.

Timing is important here. You don't want to withhold critical information just because it's not time for your scheduled team meeting. You want to disseminate that stuff ASAP. Sometimes, however, organizations need to control when information is released – they want everybody to get it at the same time. Doing this at a team meeting allows the opportunity for everyone to hear it (not just read it), ask questions, and discuss implications.

3. To share information that would be of interest <u>to all</u> team members.

This one's a tricky balance. What's interesting and important to 3 team members might be boring and irrelevant to 3 others. Sometimes as a leader you feel like you can't win! Your team will tell you they want to know what's going on in the rest of the team, but their reaction and body language tells a different story. The key is to put some time limits and boundaries around team member info sharing. For example, you might ask each team member to come prepared to give a brief (1-2 minutes each) update of the

top 2-3 things they are working one. Or, ask everyone to share one "win", one thing they learned, one customer problem they solved and how, a new piece of technology, etc….

After a while, switch it up so it stays interesting.

4. Team (or maybe individual) recognition.

Team meetings are a great way to celebrate big and little accomplishments! This is where food comes into play. Ice cream sundaes, a platter of cookies, whatever…make it fun, do it often, and mix it up.

As for individual recognition – again, this one's hit and miss. Some like it and some hate it. You might want to ask each team member how they prefer to be recognized.

5. Learning.

Most people are social learners. Bring in a guest speaker, show a short video, demonstrate a new app or piece of technology/equipment, etc… Get team members involved, build better interdepartmental relationships, and learn as a team!

On the other hand, here are 5 things NOT to do at a team meeting:

1. Manage individual performance.

My all-time numero uno team meeting pet peeve. This is when the manager asks each team member to bring status reports or goal updates to the meeting. The manager then grills each team member, provides suggestions, solves problems, makes decisions, etc… while the rest of the team fiddles with their smart phones and waits for their turn on the hot seat. This is lazy management! Team meetings are no substitute for regular one-on-one meetings with each team member. While this may seem like an efficient use of your time as a manager, it's a waste of time for your team.

2. Share information that could otherwise be shared with an email.

This stuff is typically "agenda filler" – the manager scheduled a 90 minute meeting and had 30 minutes to kill.

3. Be late.

I'm talking about a manager, due to their *very* important busy schedule, breezes into *their own* team meeting 5-10 minutes late! It's a slap in the face of your team members. Unfortunately, it happens all the time.

4. Have the meeting without anything from the 1-5 list above just because the meeting it's on the calendar.

If this is the case, cancel it! However, shame on you if you can't think of anything from that list above. That usually means you didn't start thinking about the meeting until the day before (or 10 minutes before).

5. Try to cram too many items (even if they are in the list of 5 things above) into too little time.

While this one's not as bad as meeting filler and fluff, rushing through important agenda items or not getting to important stuff leaves the team feeling frustrated. Think about the agenda – try to visualize what a great, engaging meeting would look like – and design agendas as if you're planning an important event. It *is* important, right?

Following these guidelines won't guarantee that your team will look forward to every team meeting like they look forward to quitting time on Friday, but at least they will rank them more favorable than root canals and performance reviews.